

Now, none of this is an exaggeration. Economist Mark Zandi, a former adviser to the late Senator McCain, wrote recently that a default would be “a catastrophic blow to the nascent economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.”

He also warned that “Americans would pay for this default for generations.” I hope my Republican colleagues heard the last part, as they are thinking of indulging in the political game put forward by Leader McConnell. “Americans would pay for this default for generations.”

Of course, we all know by now that the Republican justifications for opposing raising the debt ceiling are entirely bunk. They say they are opposed to new spending, but the Wall Street Journal has said: “Raising the debt limit wouldn’t facilitate future spending, and Congress would still need to raise the debt limit this fall even if no new major spending programs are enacted.”

Do you hear that, Republicans? This is the Wall Street Journal. Even if not a single new spending program were enacted, we would still have to raise the debt that was incurred by President Trump and by all of your votes.

How crass can you be? How heartless can you be? You voted to spend these moneys because of COVID—it was a valid reason—and now you don’t want to pay for it, and you come up with some lame political sophistry, trying to justify it. But everyone sees through that—everyone.

The truth is, we will be voting to pay for the debt accrued under Presidents of both parties, including the \$8 trillion added to the debt under President Trump. Both sides incurred the debt; both sides should pay.

It wasn’t long ago that threatening a default on national debt was something you only heard in the fringes of the Republican Party. About 10 years ago, the Republican Speaker at the time called the idea “insanity.”

But today, it is literally the party line—a sad commentary on just how far down the rabbit hole the Republican Party has gone.

If my Republican colleagues disagree, they have a simple option: They can vote yes to keep the government open. They can vote yes on suspending the debt limit. It is in their hands.

But if Republican votes favor a shutdown and default, the American people will see exactly who is responsible for throwing our country into crisis.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, on nominations. Now, on the activity happening on the floor today, thanks to the political stunts and a handful of obstructionist Republicans, the Senate is going to spend a lot of extra time today on something that is generally a routine process: confirming uncontroversial but critical nominees to the Department of State and other important Agencies.

Of all the mandates of the government, there is one that holds impor-

tance above all others: keeping the American people safe from all threats, foreign and domestic.

To fulfill this responsibility, the President relies on a vast army of dedicated public servants across the government. They are the expert diplomats, Under Secretaries, and Assistant Secretaries whom we rarely hear of in the news, but they play an indispensable role in keeping America safe. Oftentimes they are quiet heroes.

But, today, an alarming number of posts essential for our national security remain vacant because a handful of Republicans have decided to hijack the confirmation process and put a hold on not just a few but on many critical nominees.

As a result, today, we are going to have to take the long way to move forward with seven of the nominees currently on hold. We need to get these confirmed as soon as possible. And if the irrational stonewalling by Republicans of these noncontroversial nominees continues, we may need to take this tedious exercise again in a greater magnitude.

The Republicans responsible for holding up these confirmations are deliberately making the American people less safe in a vain and futile effort to enhance their own political fortunes. Every single one of these nominees was reported out of committee with bipartisan support. There is no rational basis for their delay. The fleeting gain these Republicans receive will pale in comparison to the damage they are causing to our country.

It is not just an issue of a few nominees here and there. This is scores of diplomats and other public servants who are unable to get to work because a few Members of this body are holding everything up. It is intentional sabotage of this Chamber’s operation, and it is going to hurt our government’s ability to respond to crises around the world.

Imagine if you dial 911, but nobody has been hired to pick up the phone on the other side. That is more or less what these Republicans are doing to many of our diplomats, who are often the first line of defense when an international crisis breaks out.

Of course, this Chamber, under this leadership, is not going to tolerate a few Members who want to muck up the confirmation process to make a scene. It will just take a little longer to get them done—maybe nights, maybe weekends.

We will focus today on pushing these nominees through for the sake of our national security.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PETERS). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. McConnell. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. McConnell. Mr. President, Republicans are shining a spotlight on the reckless taxing-and-spending spree that Washington Democrats are writing behind closed doors. The radical left is pushing in all their chips. They want to use this terrible but temporary pandemic as a Trojan horse for permanent socialism. And President Biden, who ran as a unifying moderate, is either powerless to stop them or does not wish to.

An avalanche—an avalanche—of crushing tax hikes that would hurt families and would help China; a government power grab over more of Americans’ healthcare decisions, childcare choices, family finances, and daily lives; trillions upon trillions more in government spending when families are already facing inflation—none of this, of course, will get a single Republican vote in either Chamber.

Democrats have not even consulted us. They haven’t tried to earn our votes. From the start, they have planned to use a party-line, fast-track process to ram through the Senate this version of their vision of America.

That is why Republicans will not help this unified Democratic government with its basic duty to raise the debt ceiling. This could not be simpler. If they want to tax, borrow, and spend historic sums of money without our input, they will have to raise the debt limit without our help.

This is the reality. I have been saying this very clearly since July, and I think our Democratic colleagues are finally getting it because now they are fumbling for bogus excuses. They remain confident they can spend trillions of dollars to remake the entire economy in a couple of weeks, but, supposedly, they just cannot clear this much smaller procedural hurdle without Republican help. Really? Give me a break.

Earlier this year, Senate Democrats specifically requested and received extra flexibility around the reconciliation process. They have every procedural tool they need to promptly advance a separate stand-alone piece of legislation addressing the debt limit without a single Republican vote. Our colleagues have plenty of time to get this done. It is laughable—laughable—to hear some Democrats claiming they simply don’t have enough time.

Last month, Democrats introduced a sweeping budget resolution on August 9 and passed it before sunrise on August 11—3 days. Our Democratic colleagues have about a month—a month—plenty of time to do their job as a unified government and protect the full faith and credit of the United States.

The Democratic chairman of the House Budget Committee admitted last weekend that Democrats could—could—tackle the debt limit alone, but they just don’t want to. Some Senate

Democrats have said similar things. This may be inconvenient for them, but it is totally possible. And this Democratic government must not manufacture an avoidable crisis for the sake of their own convenience.

Senate Democrats know what they need to do. Let me lay it out. They will need to write a short resolution amending their previous budget resolution with new debt limit instructions. You have to take that to the Budget Committee, which will probably deadlock, so they will vote to discharge it like they have done for other bills and nominations.

Then a vote to proceed on the floor, a limited vote-a-rama, and a vote on final passage. And then, once the budget has been amended, House and Senate Democrats will use the same fast-track process on a short and simple bill to actually raise the debt limit.

This won't be a multiweek process. It is probably about a week of the Senate's time or a little more. And they won't have to wait on their reckless taxing-and-spending spree either. They can move a stand-alone debt limit bill all on its own.

I understand our Democratic colleagues may feel inconvenienced by this. I understand this may slightly delay their partisan bill, but that is a complaint. That is a complaint, not an excuse.

We have a unified Democratic government that has decided to govern alone. They cannot put partisan ambitions ahead of basic duties. The party-line authors of this reckless taxing-and-spending spree will be the party-line owners of raising the debt limit.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. President, now, on a completely different matter, the free world faces many serious threats from rising authoritarians to resurgent terrorists. Even declining authoritarian powers like Russia pose significant challenges. These threats demand clear-eyed leadership of the world's greatest power.

But earlier this week, at the United Nations, President Biden didn't offer a rallying cry for the world to confront those threats. Instead, he tried to turn the page, literally. He bragged that "I stand here today for the first time in 20 years with the United States not at war. We have turned the page." He further claimed that "we have ended 20 years of conflict in Afghanistan."

Well, that is actually news to the Afghans. For them, the conflict continues and, for the terrorists as well, continues for them too. We may be turning the page, but they are not turning a new leaf. The Taliban-Haqqani government in Kabul is just getting started.

Al-Qaida and ISIS-K are not standing down in their fight against the West; neither are Iran's murdering proxy forces all across the Middle East.

Theocratic killers will not simply disarm themselves because our President offered scripted platitudes to United Nations diplomats. To the extent they care about international

norms, it is because they seek to destroy them. They will not be deterred by what our President calls "relentless diplomacy."

Strangely, but fortunately, President Biden's rhetoric does not even match the actions his own administration is taking. Indeed, the day before his speech, the United States targeted an al-Qaida operative in a drone strike in Syria. The President pretends we aren't at war with terrorism, but neither his own team nor the terrorists believe that. Our unilateral retreat from Afghanistan did not magically usher in a truce with terrorists; it just left us much less able to monitor and combat them.

The consequence of President Biden's slogan-driven policy is not that America's war is over; it is that America now has to fight with one hand tied behind our back.

Back in April, the President's own CIA Director warned this body—that, after retreating, our "ability to collect and act on threats will diminish. . . . That is simply a fact," he said.

In June, the Secretary of Defense told us that al-Qaida could reestablish a safe haven and directly threaten our homeland within 2 years. This is back when the administration still assumed we would have responsible partners in charge in Afghanistan.

Even then, the Secretary said that al-Qaida would reestablish a safe haven and threaten our homeland within 2 years. Certainly that timeline has now moved significantly up. So the question is, Where do we go from here? What is next?

The first step is to get some answers and create some accountability. As I have said before, the administration must answer some tough questions about both past failures and future plans.

Secretary Austin needs to explain why he supported a policy that by his own admission would allow al-Qaida to reestablish a safe haven. And we need an updated assessment of the threat we face now that terrorists, rather than our partners, control Afghanistan.

Oh, but that is just a start. America must reestablish the credible, relentless threat we once posed to terrorists in Afghanistan and beyond. The Taliban's shameful reclamation of Kabul has emboldened America's enemies all around the world. We cannot let them bank a propaganda victory. We must recapture the initiative. We can't retake the initiative with empty talk. This will take arrests, and it will take strikes—visible demonstrations of our resolve.

We must also repair our credibility with our allies and partners. America's resolve to lead the War on Terror fight must be undoubted. This is a collective effort that will take support and contributions from partners all around the world, deeper intelligence sharing, joint efforts to prevent extremists from traveling to safe havens in the first place, and a willingness to repatriate

and prosecute their citizens when they go abroad to conduct terrorism.

We have to get past the radical left's passion for cutting our defense budget down to the bone. President Biden already proposed to cut defense spending after inflation. I understand some House Democrats want to impose even further cuts from that number.

Just this week, to appease a vocal fringe on the far left, House Democratic leadership left defensive assistance for our ally Israel and their Iron Dome on the cutting room floor. A few far-left radicals get veto power over purely defensive assistance for Israel? This is madness. So are the left's efforts to cut back the authorities that our military and intelligence professionals use to protect our homeland. So is the continued talk about emptying Guantanamo Bay, talk about that. For goodness' sake, we just saw four of the five terrorists whom President Obama sprung from Gitmo take up senior positions in the Taliban government—formally in Gitmo; now helping to run the government in Afghanistan. What a combined legacy. The Obama-Biden administration let those terrorists out of prison, and the Biden-Harris administration let them retake an entire country.

No, global wars do not simply end because a President's speechwriter says so. Wars end when America's enemies no longer threaten us. Unfortunately, the Biden administration's decisions to date have not brought that victory any closer.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

VOTE ON PAN NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time on the nomination has expired.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Pan nomination?

Mr. PETERS. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN) is necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS).

The result was announced—yeas 68, nays 30, as follows: